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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by Femvision, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2007/1.

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Statement

We, the NGO's below, reaffirm the Beijing Platform of Action within which framework governments committed to the nine strategic objectives contained in Section L, pertaining to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against the girl-child. Section L addresses the need to increase the girl-child's awareness of her needs and potential, providing her with equal opportunities in education, skills development and training. It also underlines the importance of promoting the girl-child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life to ensure that women's advancement is sustainable.

The theme for the 51st Session of the CSW, "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl-child", must remind governments and civil society not only of the need to protect the girl child, but of the need to provide her with the tools to create and preserve her own well-being and safety.

The Secretary General's report on Violence against Women describes the many forms of discrimination against women and girls and the kinds of violence they lead to. The dependency, vulnerability and despair that result from restricted access to their own economic independence and livelihoods is one of the most widespread forms of discrimination against women and prevents them from taking an active part in the economic, social and political life of their communities.

When women know that they can be economically independent and how to achieve this, they are capable of removing themselves and others from situations of discrimination, violence and vulnerability to suffering and illness. They have repeatedly shown their ability and willingness to act as agents for change within their communities. It is vital to break traditional patterns of repression by giving girls access to knowledge and training to empower them to use their intelligence, capacity and skills to create economic independence for themselves and for others.

It is not enough to empower girls to be employees; they must also be empowered to be caring entrepreneurs who can bring sustainable practices, wealth and wellbeing to their communities.

In many environments, there are too few female role models to provide the inspiration needed to empower girls to attain economic independence. It is therefore the responsibility of governments and civil society to provide the training and mentoring necessary to lead to the economic empowerment of the girl-child and thus provide her with the tools to create her own security.

We therefore urge governments and civil society to:

- Initiate grass-roots programmes that will give girls an understanding of the freedom of choice that economic independence can give them and the responsibilities that it carries both in social and environmental terms; demystify the financial world: banks, credit, financial services etc and how to gain access to those services; teach basic accounting and money management skills; from an early age talk to girls about the existence of options that may not be visible in their direct environment but are nonetheless honourable and valid;

- Empower girls to be agents for change; help them develop an awareness of their values and natural instincts as women and to trust in their capacity as decision-makers; show them they can create employment and benefit for others; develop leadership skills;

- Educate girls and boys in critical thinking around their own environment and images from abroad; create discussion groups with local youth clubs and community centres to promote debate, ideas and provide advice; look for local female role models and women's organisations to demonstrate women's values at work, provide mentors and help create a critical consciousness;

- Encourage schools and teachers to educate boys together with girls on the importance of equal economic rights and the freedom that decision-making power can give to all citizens; teach the links between trade on a local level with national and global economics to give girls and boys a picture of how and why economic systems function and how economic activity effects the social and natural environment; select male and female national and international role models to surround them with alternative values and perspectives;

- Educate parents on the importance of providing their daughter with the tools to create her own safety and that of her family and community; work in conjunction with grassroots and community groups to talk to mothers about the need to give their daughters alternatives, reassuring them that economic independence can mean the survival rather than the death of tradition in today's globalised world;

- Encourage businesses to invest in girls' education; reinforce the image of the girl-child as the task force of the future- a fast-learning, capable, flexible and creative prospective employee. Connect business with educational institutions to provide direct contact and create internships and work experience opportunities;

- Encourage international business associations and women's organisations to run workshops and seminars on small business to help girls learn how to actively plan and run small business projects from beginning to end. Help girls to see the wide range of possibilities, beyond basic artisan production to using their traditional unpaid skills as carers and providers as a platform for creating a service business.

Economic empowerment leads to participation not only in economic but also in social and political life. It provides influence and decision-making power that guarantees voice. If we fail to empower girls to be free, responsible economic actors, we are not preparing a future generation of women ready to take up positions of economic and political leadership as full equals with men. The alternative perspective that women offer will continue to go unheard and the world will be a much poorer place. It is our responsibility to ensure this does not happen.

Note:
Statement endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations: Action aides aux familles démunies, International Council of Jewish Women, International Council of Women, World Organization for Early Childhood Education and Zonta International